SUMMER 2009

in-focus

The regular newsletter focusing on **Cambridge Housing Society's** services

Weathering the housing market storm

In recent years Cambridge Housing Society has developed a strong reputation, working jointly with the Flagship Housing Group, as a successful developer of affordable housing and housing for sale on a shared ownership or open market basis. On average we develop more than 100 new homes each year, in busy years completing as many as 315. Although not the size of regional and national housing associations development programmes, we are one of the top 4 developing housing associations in the sub-region.

We were careful to avoid some of the excesses in the residential housing market in the last 2 years, allowing our development programme to drop back last year rather than allowing ourselves to follow the market in making over-valued investment decisions. In stark contrast to many of our competitors, this has resulted in us not having to go back on any deals previously made, not to declare any losses and not to be at risk of breaching any

banking covenants, despite the crash in the housing market. Working with our Local Authority partners, the Homes and Communities Agency and the house builders we have found solutions to a few unsold shared ownership homes. As such, we remain strong and continuing to develop in what is now an attractive investment market.

To maximise our ability to take on the opportunities that now exist we have decided, after more than 4 years of working together successfully with Flagship Housing Group, that the staff we seconded to Flagship will return and once again work for us, delivering our development programme in-house.

We have weathered the storm well and are now looking forward to exciting times.

For further information, please contact Adrian Davey, Director of Development & Property Services, on 01223 713530 or email him at: adrian.davey@cambridgehs.org.uk

Moorlands wins top ★★★★★ award...again

Moorlands Court Extra Care housing scheme in Melbourn received an unannounced food hygiene inspection during April by South Cambs District Council's Environmental Health team and was awarded their top 5 star rating.

The scheme, consisting of 35 self-contained flats for older people, opened last summer, replacing the old residential care home, which had itself been awarded 5 stars in 2007. Denise Taylor, Manager at Moorlands praised the staff for their hard work. *"The move went very smoothly and we're all very proud that standards haven't slipped.*

The staff also prepare and cook meals that are delivered to other older people's day centres in the area, so a lot of people rely on us".

This rating continues Moorlands Court's excellent work, with CHS Homecare, the domiciliary care agency at Moorlands Court, having been awarded an 'excellent' rating from the Commission of Social Care Inspection earlier in the year. CHS provides the care and property/housing management services in all our residential and extra care services.

For more information please contact Beryl Gillespie, Head of Older People's Services, on 01223 713576 or email her at: beryl.gillespie@cambridgehs.org.uk

Ripple effects

Public policy debates frequently focus on how to engage 'hard to reach' groups, often emphasising the benefits of partnership working to do it. Our partnership with Long Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge, has tried to widen participation in lifelong learning, achieving remarkable results since we first joined forces over 5 years ago.

Our partnership means we can offer home tuition in literacy and numeracy both to our own tenants and the wider community. Most importantly, everybody can access the service, even people who cannot get out easily because of illness, disability or childcare issues. The offer has proved to be very attractive, enabling people who thought that learning wasn't for them to take their first steps on their learning journey.

The impact of the service on people's lives cannot be overestimated. Invariably people say their self-confidence has increased, but we also have stories of people moving on in more dramatic ways – from stopping self-harming to getting a job after recovering from an addiction. As one recent learner commented:

"I can now take responsibility for my family – I can write official letters, query when I think a mistake has been made and make a case for action to be taken. My whole family is learning together and we don't want to stop now! My son is at college and my granddaughter, who lives with us, is doing really well at school. Achieving these qualifications has made so much of a difference to our lives."

If you would like to know more about our partnership with LRSFC or refer your customers into the service please contact our Senior Outreach Training Advisor Pennie Williams on 01223 713756 or email her at: pennie.williams@cambridgehs.org.uk.

Spot check inspection praises new nursery

sunflower @cambourne

Sunflower@Cambourne, CHS's children's day nursery which opened last September, has had its first (unannounced) Ofsted inspection last month and was given a 'Good' rating in all respects.

Nursery Manager, Sally McGivern, herself praised in the report, said 'this is a real credit to the team who have worked really hard and creatively to bring the nursery to this level in such a short time. Our aim is to provide childcare of the highest standards and we are all committed to providing great services that are driven by what our customers want'.

The Ofsted inspector was very complimentary about the achievement and said it was almost unheard of for a nursery that had been open for only 5 months to receive a 'Good' rating in every one of the 14 areas of practice which range from leadership and management to direct work with the children, including safeguarding children.

The staff team have quickly embraced both working with the children and with the wider community, providing crèche facilities for the children of people attending a variety of courses in the local community. Parents in or near Cambourne can now access excellent local childcare, giving them the opportunity to return to work or study in confidence.

For further information please contact Maggie Bending, Supported Housing Manager, Young People's Services, on 01223 713575 or email her at: maggie.bending@cambridgehs.org.uk

A day in the life of a Senior Money Matters Advisor - *Sue Reynolds*

8.30am: Set off for an appointment with a resident in one of our sheltered schemes. Her health has deteriorated and I finally persuade her to apply for Attendance Allowance (AA). The form is complicated, so I ask her the questions and fill it in for her. Some questions are very personal so I have to approach this with sensitivity. After filling in each part I read it back to her and when completed she signs the form. I will write a letter of support and ask her GP to fill in one section. A successful application can mean an extra £70.35 a week, which is not to be sneezed at! Once the Attendance Allowance is in place I will check to see if she is entitled to any other benefits such as Pension Credit, Housing and Council Tax Benefit, as being in receipt of AA increases the chances of being eligible. I also discuss the difficulties she is having with her bathroom and advise her to consider contacting the Occupational Therapy Service to have an assessment

11.30am: Back in the office to answer emails and messages. I phone a Children's Centre Manager to arrange an appointment to visit the venue for our 'Money Matters 2 Me' financial literacy course. We have external funding to deliver workshop sessions which include attitudes to money, budgeting, banking, dealing with debt and energy advice. These sessions really help learners to increase their confidence and regain control of their finances. Many are referred into our Training Matters Service and access our Literacy and Numeracy home tuition or our ICT course.

12 noon: Lunchtime meeting with a Housing Officer and our Debt Advisor to discuss a new pilot to introduce financial health checks in his housing patch. We agree what to include and a timescale.

1.30 pm: Drive out to one of the South Cambridgeshire villages to see a 40 year old lone parent with serious depression, anxiety and physical disabilities resulting from a car accident several years ago. I had previously helped her to apply for Disability Living Allowance and she had just heard that she had been awarded the highest rate of the mobility component (£49.10 a week) and the middle rate of care (£47.10 a week). This means that she can use the mobility component to pay for a new car under the Motability car scheme. Her income support will also increase by £52.85 a week. I help her to apply for a grant from a local charity as she needs a new mattress for her on who wets the bed. She also tells me she needs more regular support as she is unable to deal with bills or paper work and everything is getting on top of her. I explain about a new Mental Health Floating Support Project, and help her to fill in the referral form. She is very relieved to have the extra income and the opportunity for more support.

3pm: Back in the office. Draft letter of support and post the charity and Floating Support applications. Input details on the database as at the end of every quarter we report to the New Horizons Action Group on our outcomes. Last quarter I brought in an extra £40,000 to our residents. Answer more e-mails and phone to confirm tomorrow's appointments.

4.30pm: Off home, but haven't finished yet! I am able to work from home as I have a lap top and internet access to the CHS network. I complete a 'Financial Capability Survey' sent to me by the Co-ordinator of the East of England Financial Capability Forum. This is a mapping exercise and CHS is one of the very few providers of Financial Capability in the county. Complete a Power Point presentation on our Financial Capability work for the new Cambridgeshire County Forum in two days time.

6.30pm: End of the day. *Tea and Hollyoaks...*

For more information about our Community Investment Services, contact Andrew Church, Community Investment Manager on 01223 713747 or email him at: andrew.church@cambridgehs.org.uk

Assistive/Telecare Technology

Assistive Technology (AT) is a new service for 2009-10 and available to older residents (over 55 years) living in CHS properties. One of our Sheltered Scheme Managers, Debbie Driver, has been trained by Cambridge Community Services' AT Team to be an AT 'champion' and deliver an assessment and equipment provision service to our tenants. 'Assistive technology' covers a range of equipment from specialist clocks, lighting and movement or falls sensors, flashing telephones and memory or medication aids and helps people to continue to live independently.

Alice Rhoden, a tenant at Barnabus Court, a CHS sheltered scheme in Milton, has benefitted from a personal voice prompt recording. When she leaves her home she can be reminded to take her keys or lock the front door, for example. The messages can be recorded so that the voice is of someone she knows, such as a family member, or in Alice's case, the scheme manager. Messages can also be recorded to remind the person of their daily appointments. 'It can be a little disconcerting having Debbie talk to me when I think I'm alone' Alice said, 'though I haven't forgotten to take my bag out with me since I've had the prompt!'

The service can be requested by CHS staff on behalf of a tenant, or directly by the tenant. In this way specialist equipment can be provided in a timely manner at little or no charge to our tenants.

If you would like to know more, please contact Beryl Gillespie on 01223 713576 or email her at: beryl.gillespie@cambridgehs.org.uk

Who runs CHS?

CHS is led by a Board of eleven local people who have a wide range of experience and skills. This is a profile of one of them.

Colin Stapleton

I first became a CHS tenant in 1997 and have been a member of the Board for the past 18 months.

On becoming a tenant, I was asked if I would like to participate in the New Horizons Action Group. This group oversees CHS's Community Investment services.

On creation of the Customer Committee, I found myself working on this and various other Committees. I found this work both rewarding and fulfilling.

On joining the Board I found the work very interesting but very intensive, but thankfully there was a very comprehensive induction process in all aspects of CHS working and various courses available. I feel that I am an active member of the Board and being retired, can commit both time and energy to it.

CHS has become a tenant led organisation in respect of listening to and involving their tenants.

Having spent 20 years in the Royal Air Force, travelling around the world, followed by 25 years in the service industry running my own businesses, I feel that I am equipped and privileged to serve on the Board.

My wife and I live in Shepreth and have a grown up son and daughter. We have four grandchildren, so with my work with CHS and babysitting duties we are kept very busy!

For more information on CHS Board membership contact Alison Booth, Corporate Services Officer, on 01223 713757 or email her at: alison.booth@cambridgehs.org.uk

Customer Liaison Officer Recruitment

Many changes and improvements have been made to the way CHS manages and delivers its repairs and maintenance services to customers. The feedback provided by customers has driven many of these changes, and this has resulted in improving satisfaction.

Our Customer Committee and Board have recently agreed that our main contractor, Roalco Ltd, provide a good level of service and that by entering into a longer term partnership, we will be able to see more significant improvements and efficiencies. So far, our partnership with Roalco has:

- Saved CHS over £200k per year on reactive maintenance (where customers request a repair) compared to 3 years ago whilst completing 99% of work on time;
- Saved CHS over £120k per year on planned maintenance (replacing bathrooms, kitchens, windows etc) whilst completing 97% of work on time

One area identified for improvement by customers is communication when major works are being undertaken in their homes.

Roalco has therefore agreed, as part of the longer term partnership, that they will employ a Customer Liaison Officer – this post will act as the customers' champion within Roalco, ensuring that their needs and requirements are at the heart of everything that Roalco delivers for us. Their main responsibilities will be when major works such as kitchen or window replacements are taking place, and these main duties will be:

- to make sure the customers are kept informed at every step of the process;
- to act as the main point of contact for customers during works to deal with any issues;
- to make sure customers' views and wishes are properly taken into account when planning works;
- to act independently when reporting to Roalco and CHS on the customer viewpoint and how the process could be managed better to improve the customer experience.

Customers are being involved in drafting the job description and deciding on the type of person best suited for the role. A customer and a CHS employee will sit on the interview panel with Roalco, so that the decisions can be made jointly and for the benefit of the customers. This post will be operational towards the end of June, and will be working immediately with customers in their homes where major works are due to be delivered.

For further information about Property Services, please contact Debbie Whitfield, Head of Property Services on 01223 713534 or email her at: debbie.whitfield@cambridgehs.org.uk

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